

FREEDOMS AMIDST NATURAL DISASTERS: A CASE FOR CAPABILITIES TO ENDURE NATURE



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abstract

Amartya Kumar Sen's capabilities approach promotes the primacy of freedoms in a development project. Natural disasters typify unfreedoms of a unique sort, underlining people's helplessness before the vagaries of nature. Apparently these unfreedoms are induced by an uncontrollable entitlement deficit in terms of natural and environmental endowments. But vast disparities in devastations caused by recent disasters in different parts of the world point towards the involvement of factors other than purely natural endowments. For a development project it raises the question of whether along with hunger, disease and gender disequilibrium; people's agencies to withstand natural disasters could also be augmented. The question underscores the need for a development project to look beyond the prevailing approach of post-disaster relief: at the possibility of imparting people with greater empowerment to respond more appropriately to unavoidable natural disasters.

- Informed by such realization, the paper uses the conceptual framework of capabilities approach to make a case for building people's entitlements to safeguard themselves against natural calamities. Dimensions of human capabilities are explored to eke out potentially more vulnerable entitlements and possibilities highlighted for development intervention to raise people's capacities to ward off natural disasters.

Three Recent natural Disasters

- In January 2010, 230,000 people died after a magnitude 7.0 earthquake decimated Haiti. Astonishingly, no one died in the 7.1 that rocked Christchurch.
- The July-August 2010 floods in Pakistan left about 2000 people dead and 20 Million affected. According to WB and ADB estimates, losses amount to US\$ 9.7 Billion.



Why discrepancy in Extent of Damage

- Extent and magnitude of disaster- uncontrollable variable
- Vulnerability- Controllable variable
People's Freedoms, Capabilities, Entitlement-
deficits



Putting the CA in perspective



- ◎ Beyond “Small Mercies”- The development of the CA against the traditional approaches of income levels, utility maximization, welfare enhancement and opportunity expansion
- ◎ The need to capture well-being in a broader informational space
- ◎ “The core characteristic of the capability approach is its focus on what people are effectively able to do and to be, that is, on their capabilities. This contrasts with philosophical approaches that concentrate on people’s happiness or desire-fulfilment, or on income, expenditures, or consumption.”

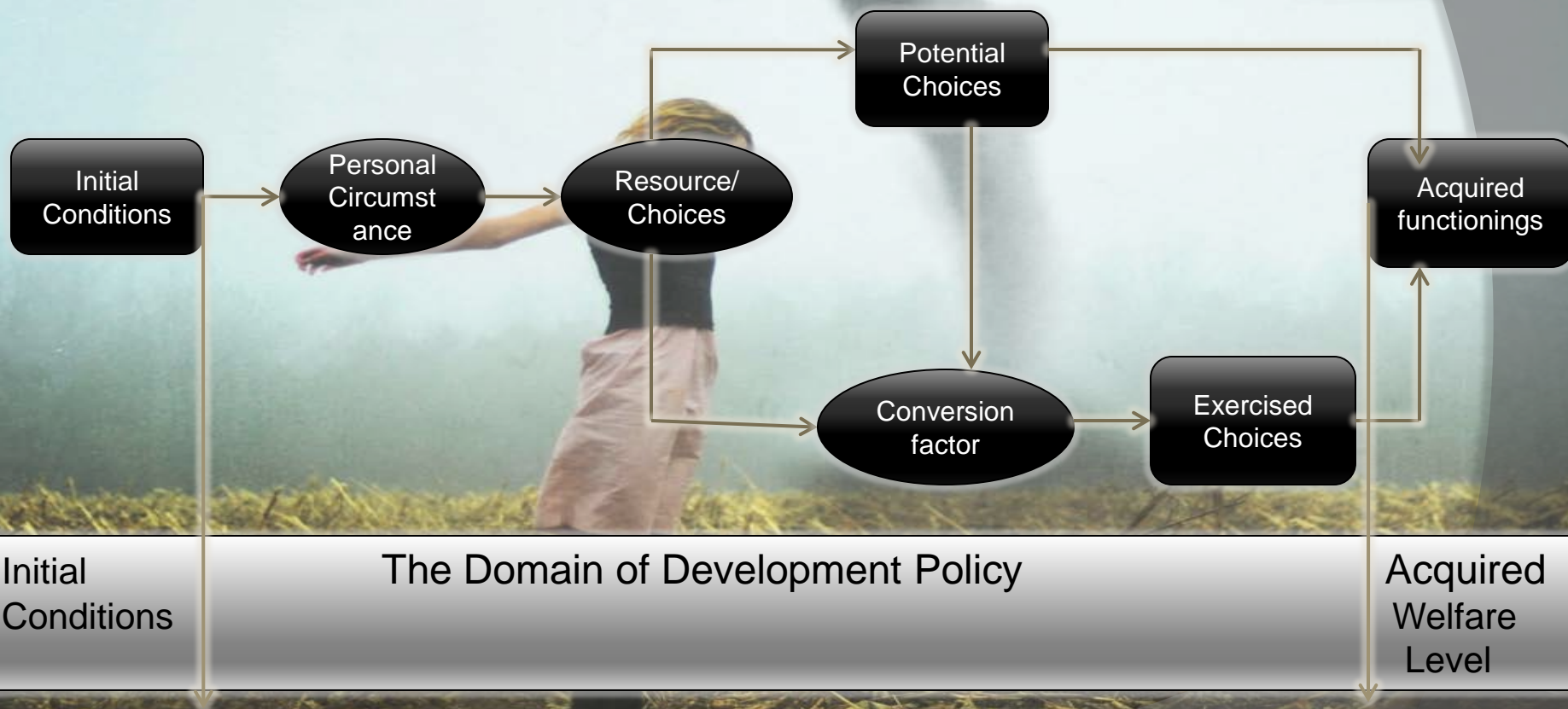
(Robeyns March 2005)

The CA Explained



- **Functionings, Capabilities and Entitlements**-the basic constituents of CA
- Functionings-the various states of being or doing relevant to the assessment of a person's wellbeing (Sen 1985: p 10)
- Capabilities- the various combinations of functionings that a person can achieve (Sen 1993:p 40)
- Entitlements- The various commodity bundles that a person commands (Nafziger Feb. 2006)

methodological Schema of the CA



The space of available choices to a person, both exercised and potential, which enables to live a life as one values, according to personal characteristics

What happens to people's capabilities set in disasters

- ◎ Loss of fit between the components of capabilities space
- ◎ Loss of functionality within a specific space
- ◎ Complete loss of functionings



What needs to be done



- Situating the unfreedoms_ Identification of the entitlement deficit_
- Minimizing the disfunction_ Search for restoring the fit_ the role of informal institutions
- Locating the avenues for alternative functioning
- Prioritize the vital entitlements
- From relief to rehabilitation_ rebuilding capabilities

Thank You

